



COOERWULL STATION AND ITS WORKERS' TRAINS

David Oveson

A single-deck interurban train photographed at Lithgow Station's Down Main platform on 15 November 1994.
G RYAN PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 037095

Cooerwull must have been one of the most low-profile stations on the NSW railways. Hidden in a cutting and for most of its life, it was not even listed in the public timetables; there was just a footnote saying that trains stop there between Lithgow and Bowenfels.

The electrification masts started to go up over the platforms at Cooerwull about January 1957, the wiring being completed between March and May of that year, and then test runs with 46 Class locomotives commenced between Lithgow and the end of the wires just west of Bowenfels. The official opening of the electrification was on 22 June 1957.

CONTEXT

Lithgow in the mid to late 20th Century consisted of a number of suburbs and localities, notably Morts Estate, Vale of Clwydd, Corneytown, Oakey Park, Extension Estate, Hermitage Flat, Cooerwull, Pottery Estate, Littleton, and Bowenfels.

I spent most summer school vacations with relatives at Lithgow in the early-to-late 1970s and have memories of U sets going past our house apparently with no one on

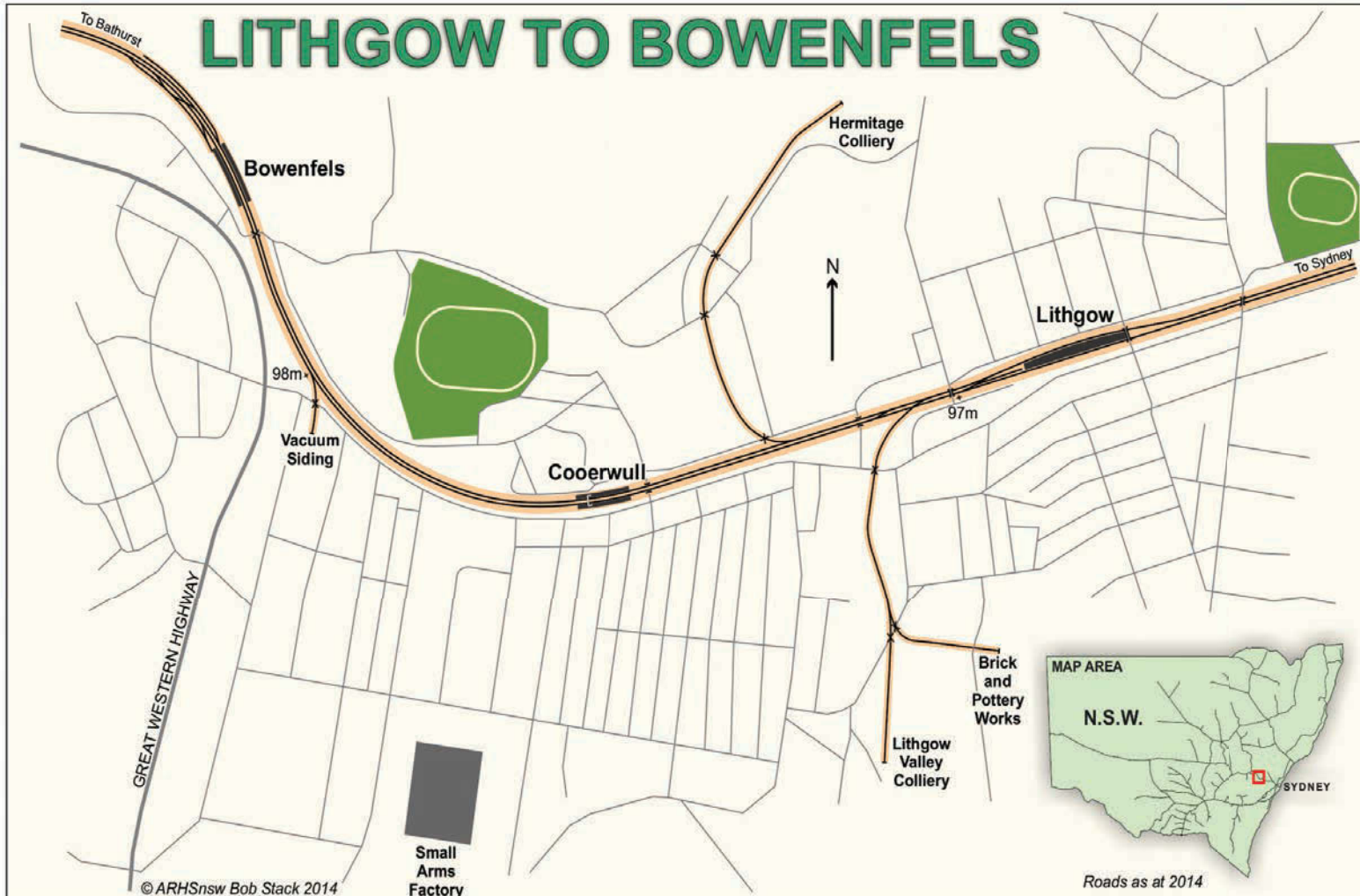
board'. My daily commute was on foot beside the Main West railway line from the direction of the Vacuum siding along Main Street, passing Cooerwull on the way. Alas, it was a hidden from view location and you had to get on the footbridge to see it. I never discovered the station until a few visits later after train services there had ceased.

Cooerwull, an Aboriginal name for a local blue flower, was the property and home name of the Lithgow Valley's pioneer settler, Andrew Brown. Today the Cooerwull Public School logo features the blue flower.

The time I did venture down there around 1976, the station timbers were starting to decay and there was a pervading smell of creosote treatment. Not having a camera at the time, I missed the opportunity to take some photos.

I have vague memories of the 'U boat' silver interurban trains gliding quietly by our house near Rifle Parade and seem to recall they were empty, which made sense as not many would travel past Lithgow or Cooerwull in those later times! I also remember tanker wagons at the Mobil depot but saw no shunting trains go in there. It may have been a nocturnal operation given the dangerous approach to the Main Street level crossing during the daytime.

LITHGOW TO BOWENFELS



About 1975 or 1976, I was waiting for the mid-morning train back to Sydney and our interurban set arrived on the Down and unloaded parcels. The guard asked if I would like a short ride and I went up front with the driver, who was dressed in the typical old steam era grey overalls. We left Lithgow and headed west towards Coorwull to cross-over a few hundred yards down the track, and following a series of bell signals, we stopped for the driver to change ends and bring the train back into the Up platform. Thus ended my only part-trip to Bowenfels on an Interurban!

LINE DESCRIPTION

Briefly, the stations and infrastructure on the line between Lithgow passenger station and Bowenfels (with distances and altitudes) were:

Lithgow Station: 96 miles 64 chains (155.78km); altitude 3017 feet (909m). The present station was opened in 1925, replacing a platform built in 1877 and the nearby Eskbank Station, which had opened in 1882. The station building, which was extended in 1961 and updated over the years, is heritage-listed as of state significance as an important regional headquarters for the NSW Railways since the 1920s, combining a range of buildings and due to its strong association with the railway and industrial heritage of the Lithgow Valley.

The James Street or **Pottery Creek Viaduct** consists of three 20 foot arches and is the oldest viaduct in use on the Main West line. The northern side of the viaduct was opened first as a single line on 18 October 1869, while duplication saw the southern side opened to traffic on 21 October 1880. The **Cupro Street culvert** opened with the line in October

of 1869. It was replaced by a brick-arch overpass in 1922.

Coorwull platforms: 97 miles 48 chains (157.08km). No altitude is given, but estimated to be about 2990 feet. The stopping place was located on a gentle 1 in 150 downgrade on a long sweeping right-hand curve bounded on the south side by Ordnance Avenue and Academy Street, with Main Street running alongside; and to the north by Wylde Street and the Showgrounds. An interesting pedestrian footbridge connected Main Street to Wylde Street and the entrance to the Platforms [see photographs]. A newer footbridge has been placed a few yards to the west of the former footbridge.

Designed, approved, built and operated for military purposes during the conflict, Coorwull station opened on Monday 23 June 1941. Its features reflected the need to minimise construction costs. The two 400 feet long timber-style side platforms for Up and Down trains with timber sleepers were a war-time economy measure. The timber-framed waiting shed with second-hand corrugated iron sheeting on the northern side was added later. Its design was typical of such sheds provided at locations serving blue-collar workers arriving at industrial sites on special trains, but the setting on top of the cutting was a unique wartime austerity measure.

The arched pedestrian footbridge in the shape of an 'A' frame was unique in New South Wales and reflected the expectation that the station would only be used for the duration of the war. Although built by the NSW Railways, the station was funded by the Commonwealth Government and it remained in Commonwealth ownership until 1958. Known as station No. 87A, Coorwull finally closed on 11 Feb 1974. The platforms were always unattended: it was basically a halt of the simplest design.

Enfield Avenue culvert west of Coorwull Station opened with the railway in 1869 and was widened from



AD60 Class Garratt 6041 offered an unusual sight shunting the Mobil Siding at Lithgow on 28 December 1964. Trains shunting this siding crossed the city's main street. N J SIMONS COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 060522

October 1880.

Bowenfels Station: Opened on 18 October 1869 at 98 miles 27 chains (158.22km); altitude 2973 feet (906.2m). As the first station opened beyond the Blue Mountains and retaining the quality stonework of its Victorian Rustin Gothic buildings, this station is also of state heritage significance. There were both Up and Down platforms provided by the mid-20th Century, being 510 feet in length on the Down side and 495 feet on the Up. The station was No. 88 on the system. From 14 August 1972, the station was worked on an 'unattended' status and it finally closed on 21 September 1974. Some time prior to closure, the platforms were reduced to just one Down platform at 260 feet in length.

INDUSTRIAL SIDINGS

The line from Lithgow to Bowenfels was served by three intermediate sidings from the earliest days as follows:

Lithgow Valley Colliery branch was located just west of the station and was worked from 1873 until 1957. A short spur to the brick and pottery works was also located off this branch but had closed by 1946. In the mid-1970s I remember some abandoned track near Queen Elizabeth Park, but by the current era all track has long been removed.

Hermitage Colliery branch was located on the Up line a few chains further west. It served the former Bowenfels Colliery from 1874 (at one time known as Lucas' siding 1887–1889). The Hermitage Colliery line lasted up to the 1980s, but is now long dismantled. I once watched a 48 Class loco heading a load of BCH coal hoppers come out on this branch in the late 1970s.

An interesting branch that was planned, but never con-

structed was a link from the **Small Arms Factory** to the main line put forward not long after the opening of the factory in 1912. It was to junction off near the Vacuum Siding and cross over both Rifle Parade and Martini Parade, before heading south to cross Methven Street and access the SAF at a loop at the rear of the complex. The rapid development of motor road transport precluded the expense of running trains to the SAF and the idea was dropped, although various proposals for its construction were brought up over the years.

The **Vacuum Siding** was located at 98.00 miles off the Down line and crossed Main Street at the corner of Enfield Avenue. It opened from 20 February 1928 and was in use for 40 years but closed temporarily in February 1968 after the points were disconnected. It was, however, reinstated later that year. It later became Mobil Siding and lasted well into the diesel era. I noted fuel tank wagons here again in the late 1970s and daytime shunting was performed here on a number of occasions. The siding precinct is still intact, but the tracks are long removed. A signal with an ornate NSWGR emblem protecting shunting movements here was still *in situ* beside the Down line and opposite Rifle Parade in the early 1980s.

WORKERS' TRAINS TO COOERWULL

The Lithgow Valley had developed as Australia's first inland heavy industrial centre on the basis of local coal, iron ore and limestone deposits, which resulted in the establishment of a blast furnace and ironworks in 1875. Industrialist William Sandford leased the ironworks from 1886 and purchased the plant in 1890, opening steel-making furnaces and a plate and sheet mill to manufacture corrugated iron

in 1894. His vision was to establish Australia's first integrated iron and steel works and he opened the nation's first modern blast furnace there on 13 May 1906.

The involvement of NSW troops in the Boer War highlighted the problems the new Australian Federation faced in future conflicts due to its isolation from armament sources, so the new Federation Government saw the establishment of a local armaments industry as a priority. Sandford had actively promoted the establishment of a small arms factory at Lithgow since 1895 and, on 1 September 1904, he had offered the Commonwealth Government the lease of five acres of land for such a facility, together with cheap coal, the supply of steel and the provision of rail siding. Ballarat, Wentworth, Hartley and the Australian Capital Territory made competing offers over subsequent years to host the facility, but Sandford continued to lobby for the establishment of the small arms factory at Lithgow, arguing the 'the Birmingham of Australia' was the ideal location due to its ready availability of cheap coal, steel and its inland location, which made it easier to defend in wartime.

In 1908 the Federal Government purchased land at Lithgow for the works and construction of the Small Arms Factory (SAF) was undertaken by the American machine tool manufacturer Pratt & Whitney. It was officially opened in June 1912 with 190 employees. Following the takeover of Sandford's iron and steel works in January 1908, the new owners worked closely with the SAF manager A C Wright, to develop the special, tightly specified grades of steel required for the production of bayonets, rifle barrels, breech blocks, breech bolts, magazine clips and other rifle parts.

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 highlighted the strategic importance of the SAF, where security was upgraded and the number of workers there reached 1500 at the height of the conflict. The aftermath of the war and the 1930s Depression brought harsh time for Lithgow's indus-

tries, with the SAF being reduced to a skeleton 'nucleus' workforce, of just 200 in 1920, but the complex subsequently diversified its production into commercial goods. As the threat of war increased again in the 1930s, new facilities were built to construct Vickers machine guns, Bren light machine guns and the production of rifles was resumed.

The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1939 brought tremendous pressure on the SAF to manufacture armaments for the Australian Army and also for other defence forces in the British Empire. A new annex factory was opened at Bathurst together with feeder factories at other towns throughout the Central West. At Lithgow, the SAF work force rose to 7000 by the end of 1943, generating a huge accommodation problem in the town. The establishment of Coorwull Station and the introduction of trains to bring workers from Lower Blue Mountains towns to the factory was one response to this challenge.

On 9 January 1941, a draft proposal to run a local service between 'Cootamundra' (crossed out and replaced with Katoomba) and the 'Small Arms Station (near Bowenfels)' noted that:

As insufficient time would be available for the turning of tender type engines, I was informed that '30' class bunker engines would be provided.

In early June 1941, a Special Train Notice amended the Western Division Working Timetable giving the details of additional train services between Katoomba and Coorwull, commencing on Sunday 22 June. The trains would consist of six car sets worked by superheated '50' class engines. Down train 101 left Katoomba at 5.42 am, stopping at Medlow Bath, Blackheath, Mount Victoria, Bell, Newnes Junction, Zig Zag and Lithgow, before arriving at Coorwull at 6.45 am, terminating at Bowenfels at 6.50 am. On Saturday, (train 105 left Katoomba at 10.50 am, arriving



Locomotive 3210 heads a Down passenger train at Lithgow Station in the 1960s. The first carriage is an RG greyhound carriage.

B COX COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 028525



The platforms and pedestrian overbridge at Coerwull Station in July 1970. Note the unique waiting shed positioned above the platforms on the right and the unique pedestrian bridge over the railway. A GRUNBACH PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 205065

Cooerwull at 11.53 am and terminated at Bowenfels at 11.57; while an additional service (Train 109) left Katoomba at 5.52 pm on Saturday, arriving Cooerwull at 6.45 pm. On Sundays Train 113 left Katoomba at 8.52 pm, arriving Cooerwull at 9.55 pm.

Up services were train 104 departing Bowenfels at 7.10 am Monday to Friday (Cooerwull 7.13–7.15) and arriving Katoomba at 8.22 am; and trains 108 and 112 departing Bowenfels at 12.15 pm and 7.10 pm on Saturdays and arriving Katoomba at 1.27 pm and 8.22 pm. The only Up Sunday service was 116 (empty cars) departing Bowenfels at 10.15 pm and arriving Katoomba at 11.25 pm. Evidently the Down Sunday service to Cooerwull was held at Katoomba until No. 87 Passenger from Sydney arrived, as a Memorandum from W H Armstrong, Asst. Chief Mechanical Engineer, to the Steam Shed Inspector at Eveleigh of 29 July 1941 complained that the use of a 32 Class locomotive on this train on 27 July resulted in a very late arrival at Katoomba, causing the late arrival of the workers train at Cooerwull. It requested that a 36 Class locomotive be used on this train on Sundays.

The Working Timetable from 12 October 1941 had trains servicing stations from Katoomba to Cooerwull that started and finished at Cooerwull with no reference to Bowenfels, so they are assumed to be empty to and from the latter station at initial start-up of the workers' train service. The workers, who used the railway to travel to their place of employment at the SAF would have had a short 10 to 15 minute walk to and from Cooerwull.

There were three trains on Saturdays and two Mondays to Fridays, which started and finished at Katoomba. Trains left Katoomba at 5.42am and 5.42pm Mondays to Saturdays, reaching Lithgow at 6.43am/pm and Cooerwull at 6.45am/pm. They then continued empty to Bowenfels to run-round,

and then the return services from Cooerwull left at 7.15am and 7.15pm, Lithgow at 7.18 and arriving Katoomba at 8.22am/pm. These trains stopped at all stations en route. It is interesting to note the exact 12 hours timing of these services.

On Saturdays the extra service was a train leaving Katoomba at 10.55am, Lithgow 11.56am and arriving Cooerwull at 11.58am. It returned from Cooerwull at 12.20pm, Lithgow at 12.23pm and terminated at Katoomba at 12.07pm, again serving all upper mountain stations en route. I have no reference to the composition of these trains, but it would be safe to assume they comprised an American suburban set, possibly of eight cars and hauled by a Standard Goods or a C32 Class locomotive.

The October 1942 timetable lists the same trains running to this timetable, but significant timetable changes had occurred by May 1944. These changes were possibly a result of shift changes at the SAF. From this month, trains left Katoomba at 5.42am and arrived Cooerwull at 6.45am, returning from there at 7.15am scheduled to arrive back at Katoomba at 8.22am Mondays to Saturdays. A very early morning service was timetabled on Tuesdays to Saturdays leaving Cooerwull at 3.33am, Lithgow at 3.38am and arriving Katoomba at 4.45am. This train had run empty to Bowenfels as the Up service, where the engine ran-round the train. The afternoon service left Katoomba at 4.40pm Monday to Saturday, Lithgow at 5.43pm and arrived Cooerwull at 5.45pm. There was no return afternoon service.

As the war came to a close, production of rifles and machine guns at the SAF ceased and the workforce at Lithgow was halved. Again the factory turned to commercial work, including the manufacture of parts for NSW Government Railways locomotives and rolling stock, as well as electric kitchen mixing machines, sewing machines and sporting rifles. The Korean War saw a pick-up in the

refurbishment of arms. In 1958, production commenced of the the Belgian 7.62mm FN-FAL rifle (coded L1A1) and of the F1 Carbine machine gun in 1965.

Accordingly, in the timetable dated March 1946, all the wartime workers' train services had been removed. By November 1949, however, these trains had been reinstated in the Working Timetable, but with a slightly amended schedule.

On Monday to Friday, Train 101 Passenger departed Lithgow at 7.04 am and was at Coorwull from 7.06–7.08 am. Arrival Bowenfels was at 7.10 am, where the cars were detached, with the loco forming Train 104 light engine departing Bowenfels at 7.35 am and arriving Lithgow at 7.43 am.

Also on Monday to Friday, Train 103 Goods (running tender first) departed Lithgow yard at 2.55 pm for Bowenfels. At 3.20 pm, it shunted en route (I assume at Vacuum Siding). After arriving at Bowenfels, it attached the passenger cars to form Train 102 Passenger, which departed at 4.15 pm, stopping at Coorwull 4.18–4.20 pm and arriving Lithgow at 4.23 pm. The workers' passenger services to Katoomba and upper mountains stations had by then finished.

Things remained fairly predictable into the early 1950s. In the Working Timetable dated November of 1951, Train 101 Passenger arrived Lithgow at 6.46 am Monday to Friday, serving Coorwull from 6.48–6.50 am, and continuing as empty cars to Bowenfels at 6.52 am. The cars were detached here and the loco formed Train 104 Light Engine departing at 7.20 am and arriving Lithgow yard at 7.25 am. Train 103 Light Engine (tender first) departed Lithgow at 5.40 pm, arriving Bowenfels at 5.45 pm. It attached the passenger cars, and then formed Train 102 Passenger. It departed Bowenfels at 6.07 pm as empty cars, stopping Coorwull from 6.10–6.15 pm and running as a passenger train, serving

Lithgow, 6.14–6.15 pm and then on to Katoomba. Probably the Down balancing of the empty cars returned to Lithgow by a goods train later that evening

Further changes came in the timetable issued in November 1952. There was just one service each Monday to Friday, namely Train 101 Down which left Katoomba at 6.00 am, Lithgow at 7.04 am and arrived Coorwull at 7.06 am, then running empty to Bowenfels. It returned light engine back to Lithgow. The usual Train 103–102 return service left Coorwull at 4.20 pm, Lithgow at 4.23 pm and reached Katoomba at 5.30 pm. These trains were worked by a Valley Heights Standard Goods engine, with the carriages based at Katoomba.

If so, their service was short-lived as the February 1955 Working Timetable again had the morning service cut back to a train starting and finishing at Lithgow. The main alteration was the afternoon departure from Coorwull on Train 102, which was brought forward to 4.15 pm. Timetables through to October 1958 were unaltered, with the morning service arriving Coorwull at 7.06am and the afternoon departure at 4.20 pm Monday to Friday. The short car set was stabled at Bowenfels for the day. By October 1958, Train 102 reached Katoomba at 5.23 pm and stabled there for the night.

ELECTRIFICATION TO BOWENFELS

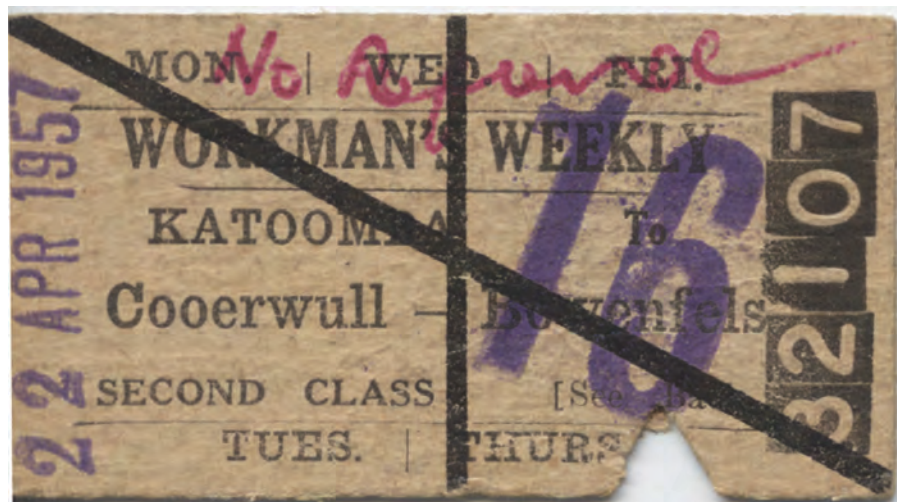
By mid-1957 the Main West line had been electrified through to Bowenfels, so a 46 Class locomotive hauled the car set, which was tabled to be worked with an SHO van (either 562 or 636), and three MFE passenger cars. A steam locomotive was used if an electric loco was unavailable.

Special Train Notice 215 was issued on Monday 4 March 1957, consequent upon electrification to Mount Victoria from Katoomba for the three months before full electrifi-



View of the platforms at Coorwull Station looking east, 31 December 1973.

N J SIMONS COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 060946



Workman's weekly ticket, Katoomba to Cooerwull-Bowenfels of 22 April 1957.

ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, EDMONSON TICKET COLLECTION

cation was opened to Bowenfels. A Standard Goods locomotive was allocated to Train 101, departing Katoomba at 6.00 am and arrived Lithgow at 7.04 am. It continued to Cooerwull and then ran empty to Bowenfels. The loco returned to Lithgow light engine (as 104), arriving at 7.03 am. It was serviced at Lithgow before returning to Bowenfels as light engine 103, where it attached to the carriages and ran to Cooerwull as Train 102 passenger, which terminated Katoomba at 5.30 pm.

Electric trains took over from Monday 10 June 1957 with accelerated train schedules. Train 101 left Katoomba (Saturdays excepted) at 6.09 am, arriving Lithgow at 7.04 am and Cooerwull 7.06–7.08 before continuing to Bowenfels.

The November 1960 timetable showed interurban 'U' sets working west from Lithgow. Train 209 left Lithgow at 7.02 am Mondays to Fridays, arriving Bowenfels at 7.10 am; then forming No. 18 Up service departing at 7.28 am, arriving Lithgow at 7.46 am and continuing on to Sydney. In the afternoon, an empty train ran out to Bowenfels and returned as Train 218, departing Bowenfels at 4.15 pm, arriving Lithgow at 4.23 pm, before continuing on to Sydney.

There were more alterations by April 1962, with services west of Lithgow on Monday to Friday only. Train 209 left Lithgow at 7.05 am, arrived Cooerwull at 7.08 am and Bowenfels at 7.10 am. It returned as Train 18 at 7.25 am, running non-stop to Lithgow for a 7.31 am arrival. As Train 215, it left Lithgow at 10.08 am, running direct to Bowenfels (arrive 10.12 am) and returned empty to Lithgow. Train 211 left Lithgow at 2.00 pm and ran direct to Bowenfels, arriving at 2.05 pm. It formed Train 30 Up, running direct to Lithgow for a 2.45pm arrival. The following Train 218 from at Bowenfels at 4.15 pm stopped Cooerwull at 4.18 pm and arrived Lithgow at 4.23 pm (I have no reference if this was loco and cars, but assume it was).

Through the 1960s, train services between Lithgow and Bowenfels followed a regular pattern. In October 1965, for instance, Monday to Friday services west from Lithgow were:

- Train 209 Monday–Friday (six-car U set; eight cars Friday) Cooerwull 7.03–7.06 am, Bowenfels 7.10 am;
- Train 215 Monday–Friday (four-car U set) Cooerwull 9.55 am, Bowenfels 10.00 am;
- Train 209a Saturday (four-car U set) arrive Bowenfels 10.10 am;
- Train 221 Monday–Friday (six-car U set; eight cars Friday) dep Lithgow 1.55 pm; arr Bowenfels 2.00 pm;

- Train 103 Monday–Friday (loco-hauled empty cars) dep Lithgow 3.55 pm, arr Bowenfels 3.58 pm;
- Train 18 Monday–Friday (six-car U set; 8 cars Friday) dep Bowenfels 7.25 am, Cooerwull 7.28–7.31 am, arr Lithgow 7.45 am;
- Train 212 Monday–Saturday (four-car U set; six-car Sat) dep Bowenfels 10.29 am, arr Lithgow 10.25–10.30 am;
- Train 220 Monday–Friday (six-car U set; eight cars Friday) dep Bowenfels 2.10 pm, Lithgow 2.15–2.30 pm for Sydney;
- Train 118 Monday–Friday (loco-hauled cars), dep Bowenfels 4.15 pm, Cooerwull 4.18–4.20 pm, arr Lithgow 4.22pm for Sydney.

By May 1968, the afternoon loco-hauled car set was booked to be worked

with a CHO van, FR1356, BR99 and FR1352 (SIB Set 122). This consist may have changed from time to time depending on carriage availability due to maintenance reasons. The above train schedule remained static, until the early 1970s. The last full timetable with the workmen trains was that of May 1972. On Monday to Fridays there were four trains scheduled beyond Lithgow, three of these being worked by 'U' sets. These were:

- Train 209 departing at 7.03 am to Bowenfels, where it arrived at 7.10 am after a stop at Cooerwull;
- Train 215, departing at 9.55 am running direct to Bowenfels (arr 10.00); and
- Train 221 departing 1.55 pm direct to Bowenfels (arr 2.00 pm).

Return Up trains left Bowenfels at 7.25a m (No. 18), 10.20 am (No. 212), 2.10 pm (220 Up), and No. 118 (the loco-hauled set) at 4.15 pm (which worked out empty earlier from Lithgow yard to Bowenfels to run-around). Trains 18 and 118 called at Cooerwull for passengers.

No weekend services were provided by that time. From 14 August 1972, Train 215/221 was cancelled beyond Lithgow leaving, just one morning and afternoon Interurban service.

An interesting feature of the loco-hauled service was that during November 1972, Train 118 (the 4.15 pm Bowenfels to Katoomba train) was worked at various times by a brand new 47 Class diesel-electric loco then being used to train Lithgow enginemen in its operation.

After Cooerwull Station was closed, the June 1974 timetable shows Train 118 with a Monday to Friday departure from Lithgow as usual, arriving Katoomba at 5.26pm. It then formed Train 115, which departed Katoomba at 6.10pm and arrived back to Lithgow at 7.06pm. I assume this was a loco-hauled train, but I recollect a two-car 600 Class diesel railcar sometimes worked this run.

Passenger services to Bowenfels continued after June 1974, but were not shown in the February 1977 timetable. Post 1974 services calling at Bowenfels were:

- 1.58 am Train 71 pass to Dubbo, Sundays;
- 2.23 am Train 60 Mail from Forbes, weekdays;
- 2.33 am Train 16 pass from Mudgee, Monday;
- 10.16 am Train 86 diesel railcar from Cowra/Orange, weekdays;
- 10.54 am Train 67 diesel railcar to Mudgee, weekdays;
- 5.03 pm Train 68 diesel railcar from Mudgee, weekdays;
- 5.16 pm Train 78 diesel railcar from Orange, Sunday;



Lithgow winters brought challenges to railway operations, as this view of a single-deck interurban train appears to be arriving at Lithgow during a snowstorm in July 1970 attests. ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 038288

- 5.30 pm Train 87 diesel railcar to Orange/Cowra, weekdays; and
- 6.14 pm Train 83 diesel railcar to Orange, Sundays.

In the May 1978 timetable a loco-hauled passenger from Lithgow to Katoomba was still listed as Train 118, departing at 4.25 pm and arriving Katoomba at 5.17 pm. It returned as Train 115, departing at 5.35 pm and arriving back into Lithgow at 6.27pm.

During vacation time in December 1978, I understood that this service still operated and duly showed up at Lithgow Station with camera in hand, only to find a bus service and had been substituted for some time. I was left with a long hot walk to Rifle Parade. While Trains 118/115 were still advertised in the 1979 timetables, they must have vanished by 1980–1981.

And so ... on a hot Friday afternoon or perhaps a rainy stormy one, the last Down train would have called at Cooerwull at around 4.20pm on 8 February 1974, and then continued on to Lithgow. Perhaps there were no passengers on board, or maybe just a few hardy enthusiasts. We may never know if indeed, it ever ran at all!

UNUSUAL EVENTS

Cooerwull platforms had a quiet time for their 33 years of existence, but a few newsworthy events occurred. Its opening day in June 1941, for instance, coincided with the day that German armies invaded the Soviet Union, an event that helped to enhance the role of the nearby Small Arms Factory.

On 31 October 1949, a possible derailment was averted by a local resident who had noticed some items such as a three link coupling, blue metal stones and some hardwood that

had been placed on the running lines near the platforms.

An Up goods train was stopped before hitting the debris that had been reportedly placed by three children aged ten to 13. That same year, on Thursday 29 December, a platform was nearly destroyed by fire. That morning a hot summer breeze had picked up a burn-off by a railway gang who were eradicating blackberries the previous day. The platform decking caught alight and the fire brigade had to dismantle part of the platform decking to extinguish the blaze.

A much more macabre event occurred on 3 August 1953. A train crew found a decapitated body on the track near Cooerwull, being that of a local man aged 40 and who had left a probable suicide note. It requested that his name not be released publicly until his sister living at Canowindra was notified of his death.

The big freeze during the winter of 1965 produced some interesting train movements. It occurred during the week commencing 19 July and brought heavy snow to Lithgow. On the Monday, Train 209 Down was worked by diesel-electric locomotive 4915 towing the six-car interurban set U10. It left Lithgow in the morning for Bowenfels, but the loco could not run round in the conditions, so the train was propelled back to Lithgow wrong road. From Lithgow, another loco towed the inter-urban unit to Katoomba.

The shortage of U sets due to the weather saw Train 221, the early afternoon Lithgow to Bowenfels service, operated by a 46 Class electric loco hauling the eight-car American suburban set BUB 25 (comprising cars HLF, LBB, LFA, LBB, LBB, LFA, LFA and HLF) and returning on the Up as Train 220. The following day, the same service was worked by set NIB 110 comprising N set of six N-type cars. This set also worked Trains 221/220 the following Monday 26 July due to a shortage of U sets.

Tenders closed on 15 June, 1974, for the removal of the platforms and they were demolished by the end of 1974.

THE SCENE TODAY

The A-frame footbridge over the western line at Coerwull was used for some time after closure of the platforms. In 1995 it was replaced by the present steel beam structure and put into storage. It was moved to the Zig Zag Railway (ZZR) Station at Top Points some years later. When I visited the ZZR in 2012, I had the opportunity to once again walk on the old foot bridge and a few memories came back for a brief moment in time!

Today passengers still travel through Coerwull and Bowenfels on the *Indian Pacific* and the Countrylink trains to Bathurst, Dubbo and Broken Hill, but they would most likely never know the station existed and, as they pass under the new footbridge, few would realise that two of the simplest and most-deserted-looking platforms on the railway system of New South Wales ever were constructed that this location.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A view from the western end engine exchange siding at Lithgow Station looking west towards the Coerwull Station site in May 2013. The Coerwull Station would have been just around the right hand curve, while the branch lines to Lithgow Colliery and Hermitage Colliery were situated a few hundred metres down the straight section branching off on both sides. Note the red electric trains stop board on the on the right-hand side near the former points for the Hermitage Colliery siding. DAVID OVESON PHOTO